DEQ TAKES SAMPLES TWICE A WEEK TO DETECT FOR ANY PRESENCE OF RADIATION IN THE AIR

DEQ Environmental Scientist Greg Gothard (middle) records radiation sampling data as the WAFB news team observes

In light of the events at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant facility in late March of 2011, the air quality as it relates specifically to radiation in the United States has been in the headlines. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Louisiana's air quality is the best it has ever been, and radiation levels are well below any level of concern. To ensure it stays that way, scientists from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality test the air for radiation twice a week at the EPA's radiation monitoring stations in Shreveport and Baton Rouge.

On April 1, 2011, DEQ Environmental Scientist Greg Gothard and DEQ Chemical & Radiological Emergency Response Manager Peter Ricca, accompanied a WAFB channel 9 news team to demonstrate the air monitoring process as it relates to radiation detection in the air in southern Louisiana. Examined at least twice a week, the filter is removed and tested with a survey meter after a 5-hour incubation period. On this day, the reading showed 0.06 picocuries, which is slightly above the annual average reading. Minute changes any particular reading can be influenced by any number of environmental phenomena. Rates in the past were around the 0.03 picocurie range, and levels that exceed 1.0 picocuries is the measuring stick by which a potential concern could arise. Since a picocurie is one-trillionth of a percent, or 0.000000000001, the sample taken on April 1st was at a reading of 0.06, or 6 percent of one-trillionth.

The EPA's 124 radiation monitors throughout the country test the air for all the particles in it, including any presence of radiation.

In addition to the EPA's air monitoring sites, the DEQ currently maintains 38 ambient air monitoring stations throughout the state, which receive data on a wide range of emissions such as nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide and particulate matter.

"While naturally-occurring radiation is present in bananas, drinking water and dental x-rays, normal background levels are usually well below the normal standard of 100 millirem that a person receives each year," said Peter Ricca, DEQ's Chemical & Radiological Emergency Response Manager. "Today's reading is indicative of the normal levels we tend to see as we conduct our weekly tests."

DEQ Environmental Scientist Greg Gothard (right) and DEQ Chemical & Radiological Emergency Response Manager Peter Ricca (middle) explain radiation monitoring procedures to WAFB news reporter Kiran Chawla (left)